

costs over the past 50 years. Just consider these statistics. At present, the standard GI bill benefit is \$650 per month for 36 months. That is it. Moreover, we now ask servicemembers who want educational benefits after discharge to contribute \$1200 while they are in the military. By contrast, when it began in 1944, the GI bill benefit included full tuition and fees at any educational institution to which the veteran could gain admittance, PLUS a monthly stipend equivalent to \$500 in 2001 dollars, \$750 for married veterans.

We thus find ourselves in an anomalous situation: at the same time that the Government is ramping up its support and subsidy for non-veterans seeking college educations, the program that started this whole thing, and which provides key benefits for those who put their lives at risk for the country, is lagging way behind.

The Veterans' Higher Education Opportunities Act of 2001 goes a long way toward redressing this situation. The key provision of this bill is quite simple: the total VA educational stipend under the Montgomery GI Bill will be increased to a level equal to the average cost of tuition at 4-year public colleges. In other words, the standard 36 months of GI bill benefits will be sufficient to allow a veteran to attend college and complete a degree.

The Veterans Higher Education Opportunities Act of 2001 provides the minimal benefit that we should be offering to those who are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to keep our country free and prosperous, and I encourage my colleagues to support it.

FARMERS AND RANCHERS ON NATIONAL AGRICULTURE

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, today marks National Agriculture Day. Unfortunately, what should be a celebration is instead overshadowed by the grim reality that many of the hard-working families producing food for this Nation and world are having a difficult time making ends meet.

I salute our farmers and ranchers for many reasons. First, Americans spend less than anyone in the world on their grocery bill. Roughly 11 percent of our household income is spent on food, and it takes a mere 38 days to earn enough income to pay a food bill for the entire year. We truly enjoy the most nutritious, affordable, and stable food supply in the world.

Furthermore, the American economic engine depends upon a strong agricultural sector to run on all cylinders. Indeed the agricultural economy is central to my State's prosperity or adversity. According to South Dakota State University, the multiplied value of agriculture's impact on South Dakota's economy was \$16 billion in 1999, one-fourth of our total economic output and more than double that of

any other industry in my State. I believe the public institutions and private businesses that lay the foundation for rural communities thrive only when we have a strong base of independent family farmers and ranchers in South Dakota.

Finally, agricultural producers are the day-to-day stewards of our land. Environmental and conservation benefits like clean water and air, rich soil, and diverse wildlife habitat are enjoyed by the public largely due to the care and management of family farmers and ranchers.

So, why aren't we truly celebrating National Agriculture Day?

Because current economic conditions are poised to squeeze many of South Dakota's 32,500 farmers and ranchers right out of business—conditions set to reverberate across the entire country. Absent farm aid and long-term farm policy fixes that provide true economic security to family farmers and ranchers, the environmental benefits and food security enjoyed by so many in this country may not survive on a sustained basis.

I believe Congress must take two fundamental steps to remedy this situation: modify the farm bill now and strengthen our laws so the marketplace is truly competitive and fair for all.

Since 1997, U.S. farmers have experienced a price crisis of enormous proportions, exacerbated by a series of weather-related disasters in many regions of the Nation. Surplus crop production, both here and abroad, weak global demand, marketplace concentration, and an inadequate farm income safety net are prime reasons for this price crisis.

Moreover, given the input-intensive nature of production agriculture, many farmers and ranchers are paying more each year for critical inputs like fuel and fertilizer. Corn and wheat farmers in South Dakota may be forced to pay up to twice per acre for fertilizer this year, and still not cover enough acres to boost yields to profit-producing levels. This situates farmers in a price-cost squeeze making it nearly impossible to earn income that covers total expenses.

As a result of an inadequate farm bill, Congress has enacted multi-billion dollar disaster programs in the last 3 years—a record \$28 billion in fiscal year 2000. USDA economists predict 2001 may be the worst year ever. Without supplemental income or emergency aid, USDA estimates that net farm income in 2001 could approach its lowest level since 1984. Clearly, the 1996 farm bill fails to provide a meaningful, fiscally-responsible, safety-net for farmers when prices are poor on an annual and sustained basis.

I am concerned that the administration's budget blueprint apparently does not grasp the economic obstacles fac-

ing the Nation's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities, as illustrated by the fact that the budget includes zero funding for emergency aid or a farm bill rewrite. This seems ironic, since every major farm group has sent myself and others on the Senate Budget Committee a letter agreeing that roughly \$10 billion per year will be needed to modify the farm bill for future years, and that around \$9 billion is needed in fiscal year 2001 to offset income losses due to low prices and failed farm safety-net policies.

Already, these farm groups and some Members of Congress are suggesting that we will simply assemble a fourth consecutive aid package for farmers in 2001. I will support this imperative aid when the time comes, but suggest American farmers and taxpayers deserve better. These ad hoc emergency bills, totaling billions of dollars each year, are a poor excuse for a long term policy fix. I believe Congress can and should amend current farm policy immediately to provide a more predictable, secure safety-net for farmers now.

One farm bill alternative I have introduced is S. 130, the Flexible Fallow farm bill amendment. Rep. DOUG BEREUTER (R-NE) has introduced an identical bill in the House. Under my Flex Fallow bill—an idea developed by two South Dakota agricultural producers—farmers voluntarily devoting part of their total cropland acreage to a conservation use receive greater price support on their remaining crop production. My proposal embodies the planting flexibility so popular under "Freedom to Farm," yet strengthens the underlying farm income safety net. In fact, my Flex Fallow bill has been endorsed by Iowa State agricultural economist Neil Harl, who believes the proposal works in a market-oriented fashion and said Flex Fallow "is the missing link to the 1996 Farm Bill."

Furthermore, I believe agricultural producers want to derive income from the marketplace, and in order to assure that can happen, Congress must restore fair competition to crop and livestock markets. The forces of marketplace concentration are squeezing independent farmers and ranchers out of profit opportunities.

The livestock market is one case in point. Meatpacker ownership and captive supply arrangements tend to transpire outside the cash market. As a result, the process of bidding in an open fashion for the purpose of buying slaughter livestock—which is central to competition—is fading away. As such, livestock producers—who depend upon competitive bidding to gain a fair price—are forced to either enter into contractual, ownership, or marketing arrangements with a packer or find themselves left out of market opportunities.

I have authored a bipartisan bill, S. 142, with Senators GRASSLEY, THOMAS,

and DASCHLE to forbid meatpackers from engaging in these anticompetitive buying practices. While my legislation is just one of many steps that should be taken to bolster our laws to protect true market competition, I believe Congress should move to address this issue in earnest.

Former President Eisenhower once said, "farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles away from a farm." Because we live in a country where the food is safe and affordable, and the environment is not taken for granted, perhaps some have forgotten President Eisenhower's simple yet honest-to-goodness words.

So today, let us not overlook the critical role farmers and ranchers play in weaving the economic, social, and environmental fabric of this country. Instead, I join all Americans to salute farmers and ranchers on National Agriculture Day. And I invite all Americans to support efforts to ensure a brighter future for the families who put food on our tables every day.

CONDEMNATION OF THE TALIBAN'S WAR ON GLOBAL CULTURE

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I rise today to condemn an act of mindless destruction by a regime known for its intolerance. I am referring to the reported destruction of the two ancient statues of Buddha carried out by the Taliban government in Afghanistan and the Taliban's call for complete elimination of all artifacts in the region.

The Bamiyan Buddha statues were priceless artifacts. They stood for centuries as guardians of the silk route that connected the ancient Greek and Roman Empires to Asia. Once one of the most cosmopolitan regions in the world, Afghanistan is now one of the most intolerant and repressive nations due to the actions of the ruling Taliban faction. The destruction of these 1,500-year-old statues was ordered and carried out for fear that they would be used for idol worship. Destroying those creations because of an irrational fear motivated by intolerance of other cultures and religions should be condemned by thoughtful people everywhere.

The country of Afghanistan and the global community has lost two of its greatest treasures, and the world is poorer for it. We cannot tolerate the willful destruction of international treasures that are a part of the world's heritage.

People of all faiths and nationalities, including Muslim communities around the world, have condemned this action. It is imperative that the United States Senate join the people and governments around the world in condemning these senseless acts of destruction, and

call on the Taliban regime to immediately cease the destruction of other Pre-Islamic relics.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG SOLUTION MUST BE A PRIORITY

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, few issues have caught the public's attention more than prescription drugs, and few are more deserving of Congress' attention.

We live at a time when we can clearly discern remarkable benefits from all manner of drugs. It is nothing short of miraculous when we consider the relative ease and success of today's treatment of common disorders, as compared with that of only two or three generations ago.

When World War II began, for example, penicillin and other similar antibiotics were known only to a small number of scientists. At the conclusion of the War in 1945, penicillin was widely available, used not only for battle wounds but for infectious diseases in the general public as well. Patients with high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels were, at best, only partially and inadequately treated in the 1940s and 1950s. Now success is the rule, rather than the exception. Calvin Coolidge's son died in 1924 as a result of a blister and a skin infection after playing tennis at the White House. An infection such as that today would be treated as simple, outpatient therapy.

While these examples are noteworthy and provide us with a valuable perspective of times gone by, the hard, cold fact is that many of these modern miracles are still out of the reach of too many American citizens. They simply cannot afford the drugs that might so often prove lifesaving, because of either no insurance or lack of drug coverage within their insurance.

Recent studies indicate that if you go to virtually any other industrialized democracy, the cost of prescription drugs is about half what it is in the United States. We pay about double what anybody else in the industrialized world pays. That to me is so utterly unacceptable and unfair.

When Medicare was created 35 years ago, its benefits were based on private sector coverage, which rarely included prescription drugs. Now, however, virtually all private sector plans include coverage for prescription drugs, while Medicare does not. As a result, many millions of Americans, both Medicare age and younger have either inadequate or no prescription drug insurance at all. A byproduct of no coverage is that these patients wind up paying the highest rates of anyone—an average of 15 percent more than those with insurance. Many of these uninsureds, including the seniors often called "The Greatest Generation" are not filling prescriptions because of their cost, choosing between food and medicine.

Or they split pills in half to make them go farther. This is shameful. These are very real every day problems that beg for help.

I strongly believe that all Medicare beneficiaries deserve affordable coverage and financial protection as prescription drugs costs grow at double-digit rates. Astronomical drug prices have come hand-in-hand with the great improvements in drug therapy. Spending for prescription drugs in the United States doubled between 1990 and 1998. In each of the 5 years between 1993 and 1998, prescription drug spending increased by an average of 12.4 percent. In 1999, the drug spending increase was 19 percent and just last year we saw another double digit increase. My office recently completed a three-year statewide survey of prescription drug prices in South Dakota, using a sample of the most heavily prescribed drugs for seniors. I was astonished to find that over 60 percent of the drugs' prices grew at a pace that exceeded the cost-of-living adjustment provided by Social Security, which many Medicare beneficiaries rely on to meet their daily financial needs. In fact, 30 percent of the drugs increased at a pace that was double that of the COLA.

In response to evidence such as this, along with having heard from thousands of concerned South Dakotans affected by skyrocketing drug prices, I have recommitted myself to finding a solution for the prescription drug needs of all Medicare beneficiaries. As such, I have reintroduced two bills that comprise the main pillars of my prescription drug plan: the Prescription Drug Fairness for Seniors Act of 2001, and the Generic Pharmaceutical Access and Choice for Consumers Act of 2001. I don't proclaim these proposals to be the magic bullet that solves all of our nation's prescription drug concerns but they are sensible, financially reasonable approaches that should be a part of an overall prescription drug plan for Medicare beneficiaries. The Fairness bill would provide Medicare beneficiaries access to prescription drugs at the same low prices that drug manufacturers offer their most favored customers. As well, I strongly believe we cannot develop a financially feasible prescription drug benefit without maximizing the utilization of generic drugs. My proposal would increase access and choice in Federal programs by encouraging greater usage of generic pharmaceuticals as a safe, less costly alternative to an often expensive brand-name pharmaceutical. Generic pharmaceutical drugs have been shown to save consumers between 25 percent and 60 percent on their average prescription drug and this plan would greatly benefit many of the most vulnerable members of society.

I do believe Congress needs to create a universal, voluntary drug benefit in the Medicare program, one that provides all Medicare beneficiaries with